DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 110 375 SO 008 498

AUTHOR Gunn, Angus M.
TITLE Topic Today. Report for 1974/75.
PUB DATE May 75
NOTE 11p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Cultural Awareness; Cultural Pluralism; *Current Events; *Curriculum Development; Educational Innovation; Elementary Secondary Education; Learning Activities; *Newspapers; *Social Studies; *Teaching Techniques; World Affairs; World Problems
IDENTIFIERS Canada

ABSTRACT

Presented in this document is a report of an innovative approach to social studies through the use of newspapers in the classrooms in Canada. Topic Today is a one-page newspaper of current affairs geared to grades 6 through 8, but applicable to secondary grades, developed to make available resources of current affairs found in regular newspapers and magazines. The development of this resource is based on the premise that textbooks are outdated, news magazines are unpredictable, and regular newspaper coverage is rarely concentrated enough to be of real benefit for a single course. Topic Today brings together on a single page pictures, maps, statistical data, references to Canada, and descriptions that focus on a single current issue and place, with reference to specific classroom courses. The questionnaire that was sent to 300 participants to evaluate and aid in the future issues of the paper is also contained in the document. An extract of a research study of the newspaper is included which shows the results of student knowledge and attitudes of cultural differences after using Topic Today. (Author/JR)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED110375

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

TOPIC TODAY

Report for 1974/75

		Page
1.	Summary	1
2.	Introducing the new series	3
3.	Mid-term report	4
4.	First term research findings (interest and reading level)	6
5.	Second term research findings (attitudinal change)	7

SP008 498

Angus M. Gunn

UBC

Angus M. Gunn

Chairman, Educational Advisory Panel

May 1975

Summary

There has been a growing need for a new kind of disposable social studies textbook, one which would narrow the gap between the perceived world of the classroom and the reality outside and, at the same time, increase the involvement of parents in the day-to-day work of the school. Such a textbook would also have to be more interesting and easier to read than the prescribed teaching materials. The newspaper was seen as one way of meeting this need but there were difficulties as well as advantages.

A UNESCO report points out that schools today provide only 25% of the information acquired by young people between 6 and 18 compared with 75% a generation ago. The difference, according to this report, is due to the increasing role of the media as a dispenser of information. But most North American students are showing low levels of achievement in reading skills, and they cannot read the daily newspaper. Other limitations in the direct use of newspaper material are summarized below.

- Too many distractions on a given page. Content is scattered rather than concentrated.

- Information not selected and not sequenced in a form that suits the curriculum.

- Pages consistently interspersed with "high level" content, that is content that is too abstract for the level of conceptual development of a 12 year old.

- Emphasis on "news" content (power, tragedy, sex, money) rather than on the day-to-day life of people.

- Except for magazine articles a lack of the kind of supporting data needed in schools - pictures, statistics, comparisons with Canada, fine detail on daily life, maps.

The potential of the daily press however is phenomenal. In accessibility and cost it cannot be matched anywhere. It provides a brand-new, 300 page textbook every morning for the price of a cup of coffee. Some imaginative approaches are needed to take advantage of the enormous potential of this medium. The traditional "newspaper in the classroom" approach is well-known through such publications as: The Press in the Classroom (UNESCO); Learning from Newspapers (CDNPA); Foreign News and World Views (FPA); The weekly news quiz game (Santa Barbara). The special student newspaper, like the New York Times Student Weekly is another kind of traditional approach. But something different is now needed. Topic Today is one answer to this demand, and initial experiences suggest that it is likely to go a long way toward meeting the growing need described above. Its essential characteristics are:

- bringing together on a single page pictures, maps, statistical data, references to Canada, descriptions that focus on a single current issue and place - all with reference to specific classroom courses.

- selecting out of the available content material that is appropriate in terms of reading level and quality of language. Content too is screened to remove such things as extreme violence and extreme deprivation.

- ensuring that there is an adequate level of fine detail - a kind of cultural infrastructure - that will meet the level of conceptual development of a 12 year old. This is perhaps the most crucial aspect of the work. If a youngster is not met at his own level of data he will lose interest in what is being taught. Worse still he may seriously misunderstand what is given, and this can lead to prejudice or stereotypes.

- gearing the page to the B.C. Social Studies curricula at grades 6 and 8 levels. At these levels a social issue of the day is selected, then developed through the study of the place that best epitomizes the issue.

To date Topic Today has operated on a small budget of time and money but with the right mix of personnel - a social studies educator who identified the focus for each issue and assembled the content; a reading specialist who monitored language; a classroom teacher who kept our feet on the ground; a copy editor who was the only newspaper staff member involved. It so happens that the copy editor was a trained and experienced teacher but this element of expertise was not essential. Any other competent copy editor would have sufficed. Most of the content for the whole project came from the wire services of the New York Times, The Christian Science Monitor, Gemini news services, and Canadian Press.

In spite of the success of the year's work there were severe limitations and frequent errors as a result of the constraints of time and money and, even more so, as a result of the late date for a final commitment to the project. It was impossible to gain sufficient lead time to be able to do all the necessary cross-checking of data. The planned time for Fall and Winter work was then absorbed in the immediate tasks of collecting, editing, and assembling.

In order to provide adequate depth, plus the infrastructure of cultural detail needed for 12 year olds, it was necessary to cover a stretch of time that on the average reached back as far as 18 months. This further complicated the process of cross-checking data. It was virtually impossible to find out all we wanted to know short of extended long-distance telephone calls to the countries concerned.

As the project moves into Canadian material for 1975/76 the major problems of the past year will not be present. There is more lead time available and the problems of cross-checking information are relatively simple. A telephone call is always possible. The challenge of the project however is not removed because of the absence of these particular limitations. The readers are more critical in an area of content that is more familiar. The demand for a school page that will be equal in quality to the best pages of the paper remains as a constant challenge. And there is the ever-present prospect of the competition which success always creates.

Against these challenges is the solid evidence of success outlined in the following pages. Topic Today has established itself as a viable enterprise that is worthy of still greater investment of time, talent, and money.

Areas included in 1974/75

Sept. to Dec. 1974	India	Burma
	Bangladesh	Thailand
	Pakistan	Malaysia
	Sri Lanka	Singapore
	Nepal	Indonesia
	Indo-China	China
Jan. to Apr. 1975	Zaire	Tanzania
	Zambia	Uganda
	Rhodesia	Kenya
	South Africa	Ethiopia
	Sudan	Portuguese Africa
	The Sahel	
Apr. to May 1975	Venezuela	Peru
	Brazil	Ecuador
	Argentina	Colombia
	Chile	Bolivia

This Canadian referent was used in every issue, along with a map showing location with respect to Canada.

Facts and Figures

	Country under study	Canada
Population	-	22.5 million
Physical Size	-	3,560,000 square miles
Birth rate (per thousand)	-	18
Death rate (per thousand)	-	7
Capital City	-	Ottawa
Main languages	-	English, French
Latitude limits	-	45°N to 75°N
Per capita annual income	-	$3,500.00

THE PROVINCE BRINGS THE WORLD TO THE CLASSROOM
The Province Saturday, September 21, 1974
Extracts from the Editor's Memo by Bob McConnell

The idea, basically, is very simple. Once a week - every Tuesday - we will run a full page of material designed for use in school classrooms. It will deal with current affairs, and for the sake of consistency will be keyed primarily to the Grade Seven social studies curriculum. The first one dealt with the problems of rural life in India. For the balance of this term we follow through on different areas and aspects of life in Asia.

The page, of course, is not designed only for students. We have no intention of writing down to our audience, and the material we're using is not juvenile

in the least. Much of it comes from the reams of copy that pass through and out of every newspaper office without ever getting into print. We've simply made room for it, and provided a consistent framework for its use.

The intention is to help correct a weakness in the resources available to schools for current affairs courses. For this sort of thing textbooks are automatically out of date. News magazines are unpredictable and tend to be far too U.S.-oriented. Regular newspaper coverage, while of some use is rarely concentrated enough to be of real benefit for a single course.

For some years educators have been grappling with the textbook problem, with only middling success. A great deal of time and money have been spent on other kinds of teaching aids, but time and money remain the real problems. Production is slow, and the innovations remain expensive. For many subjects the awful competition of television looms, giving children a sense of immediacy in front of the tube that is hard to compete with in the classroom.

But as long as the school system can manage to teach children to read, print remains the best all-round means of communication. For most purposes, the human brain can take in more information faster from a printed page than in any other way. And print is cheap, durable and convenient.

With the assistance of a daily newspaper, print is also fast. It can no longer beat television for some kinds of spot news coverage - nothing is faster than immediate. But on a day-in, day-out basis we bring more information to more people faster than television ever seems likely to do.

That's why we're happy to be able to get into the schools in this way. We're demonstrating one of our manifest advantages as a news medium. We're bringing the world into the classrooms, and the classroom into the home. We're helping, we hope, to convince youngsters that school, learning and life are all a single process. And that message, for what it's worth to kids, teachers and parents, is now going out as far as places like Masset and Charlie Lake. For our money - and it's costing us money - that's not a bad Tuesday's work.

EDUCATION BC PUBLISHED BY
SCHOOL TRUSTEES ASSOCIATION VOL III No. 4 NOVEMBER 1974

10,000 B.C. students know 'Topic Today'

The Vancouver Province's experiment in disposable textbooks is reaching 10,000 students in nearly 300 schools throughout British Columbia.

This fall, the Province turned over one full page every Tuesday to three members of the education community and appointed Province staffer Dan Mullen as editorial support and layout supervisor.

The team consists of Mullen, former education reporter and teacher; Gudrun Dewar, coordinator of professional development for the Vancouver School Board; Angus M. Gunn, professor of education at UBC and William Willson, social studies teacher in Coquitlam.

Gunn said that the comments and requests for copies continue to grow. "One North Vancouver principal commented that the page is 'the greatest discovery since chalk'".

The page, called Topic Today, is aimed primarily at social studies students in the 11- to 14-year age range, but it is written to appeal to all Province readers.

Hugh McLennan from Prince George wrote to the Province: "As a truck driver who, like many people, does not have much time to research current topics, I would like to thank you for the recently instituted feature, Topic Today..."

Team member Dewar said that not only is the page providing students with hard-to-get material for school work, but "many of our families don't subscribe to a newspaper, so this may be the only opportunity for a student to see one."

Gunn first approached the Province about an education page a year ago, but the stage had already been set. "There is a general trend toward the disposable textbook", Gunn said, "a major thrust to knock down traditional school walls and move learning out into the community". This trend "coincided with California using the newspaper as a textbook for junior colleges."

Province Editor Bob McConnell said that the Province had been most interested in what was happening in California. At the time that Gunn appeared, however, they had decided that the California material was "too American", and that to develop a special set for B.C. would be "just too complicated". But the Province was intrigued with Gunn's proposal, McConnell said, "We thought it had considerable merit so we began working with him."

Gunn drew his team together last summer and the first Topic Today page appeared in the September 17 edition. The topic for this term is Asia in what Dewar said is an "emphasis on culture rather than politics". Africa will be explored next term.

McConnell said that so far the page has been tremendously successful. "I would be most surprised if this page doesn't become a permanent thing." He added that the Province will try to collate and reproduce the pages on Asia at the end of the term for distribution in booklet form to schools. "This way the materials can continue to be used for at least two years."

McConnell said that the Tuesday edition is now provided free to all participating schools, but it is an expensive proposition. "Starting next term, we will be charging half the regular price of the Province in order to cover some of the newsprint cost."

Willson said that his classes accept the paper "with excitement. There has been a good response." Students get the total impact of receiving a newspaper since "someone picks up and delivers the paper to each student's desk at school."

One of the most exciting things about Topic Today, according to Gunn, is that it represents a combined effort on the part of business, the university, the school and school administration. "Universities, publishers and schools used to do their own thing," according to Gunn. "This page is a model of curriculum development involving cooperation and resources of the community.

QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO 300 PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS IN DECEMBER, 1974

Our Educational Advisory Panel would appreciate your co-operation in replying to the following questionnaire, to assist them in planning future "Topic Today" pages. Your comments will be forwarded to Professor Gunn, Chairman of our Educational Advisory Panel, at the UBC Faculty of Education.

Check one only of each item.

1. I am using The Province page mainly with (a) grade 5 students _____
   (b) " 6 " _____
   (c) " 7 " _____
   (d) " 8 " _____
   (e) others - indicate grade _____

2. Compared with other social studies material that my students study in school, The Province materials in Topic Today are :-
   (a) much more interesting and worth while _____
   (b) more interesting and worth while _____
   (c) about the same _____
   (d) less interesting and worth while _____
   (e) much less interesting and worth while _____

3. Compared with other social studies materials that my students study in school, The Province materials in Topic Today are :-
   (a) very much easier to read _____
   (b) easier to read _____
   (c) about the same reading level _____
   (d) more difficult to read _____
   (e) very much more difficult to read _____

Results

Returns were received from 75 out of the 300 schools. Approximately half of the 75 were in the Vancouver area and half were from places all over B.C. Approximately half of the 75 reported dominantly secondary usage of Topic Today, half reported elementary usage.

Item 2. A score of 5 was awarded for an (a) answer, 4 for a (b), 3 for a (c) and so on. In the aggregate: 48 were at level 4 or 5
25 were at level 3
2 were at level 2

Item 3. Scoring was the same as for Item 2. In the aggregate:

20 were at level 4 or 5
41 were at level 3
14 were at level 2

EXTRACTS FROM "MEASURING POSITIVE ATTITUDES IN INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING"
part of a M.A. research study at UBC (1975) by May West

An unpublished longitudinal study of the growth of elementary school children's ideas suggests that the peak in favourable attitudes toward people of other countries at age ten may be a national one and that the upward trend in elementary school children's friendliness to foreigners continues unabated until the end of the elementary school.

There is general agreement however that at about fourteen years of age, children tend to have more differentiated attitudes, to be less friendly toward foreigners, and to be showing signs of thinking along stereotyped lines. The downward trend to interracial goodwill appears to begin when various factors come into play in adolescence.

Unless maximum use is made around the ages of ten to twelve, to extend children's knowledge of other nations and to encourage understanding of them, the trend of change for many individuals in adolescence is likely to be toward a withdrawal of sympathy or a growth in actual antipathy for foreign groups.

The elementary social studies teacher should be aware therefore that his pupils are passing through a crucial stage in their ideas of and attitudes towards foreign peoples and he should be making important contributions toward fostering a realistic understanding of the world, without which, children's ideas of certain key lands may remain deficient and their views become distorted. In this context "Topic Today", published weekly by the Province Newspaper, should be one means of bringing meaningful information to children, through a medium which is familiar to them in the home situation.

Through informal research the writer investigated the effect of the articles themselves, on the attitudes of elementary school children toward the peoples they described, in this case Asia. The study involved a group of Grade 5 children in the Coquitlam School District. Grade 5 was chosen because all available Grade 6 children had already studied culture realms of the world for a period of two terms. Twenty eight children in a heterogeneous class who had had no formal teaching on 'other nationalities' were pretested to obtain a measure of their attitudes toward and beliefs about the people of Asia, using a Semantic Differential Technique, (see below) developed by the writer.

A different 'Topic for Today' dealing with a country in Asia was introduced each day for one school week. After reading the relevant articles, the children were allowed to discuss the material in a small group situation, before completing the study sheet.

After treatment, the children were posttested using the same measuring instruments. The statistical analysis, (see below), reveals a significant improvement in the attitudes of the children towards Asians. Bearing in mind the studies were carried out in less than ideal conditions, over a short period of time, the vocabulary was difficult for Grade 5 children and the material was used in isolation, these results are very encouraging and suggest that the approach is well worth continuing.

The unit of study on Asia was designed so that the children could work in small groups and discuss issues freely, without feeling that what they might say had to conform with what the teacher would want them to say. All th children studied the same topic at the same time, although the suggestions may be used equally effectively with children studying different topics or working in an integrated situation studying at different times.

Discussion, problem solving, simulation and role playing have all been shown to be effective in helping to develop positive attitudes in people. The suggestions on the study-sheets attempt to incorporate some of these ideas. The questions provided are intended to help children to focus on the various issues and to develop attitudes and feelings about them.

Semantic Differential

If you think that people who live in India are very good you mark X as follows.

Good X ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Bad

If you think they are good you mark

Good ___ X ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Bad

If you think they are only slightly good you mark

Good ___ ___ X ___ ___ ___ ___ Bad

If you think people from India are very bad you mark

Good ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ X Bad

If you think they are quite bad you mark

Good ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ X ___ Bad

If you think they are only slightly bad you mark

Good ___ ___ ___ ___ X ___ ___ Bad

If you think that people from India are neither good nor bad you mark

Good ___ ___ ___ X ___ ___ ___ Bad

Place you marks down quickly. We want your first impressions. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Be sure to mark only one X for each pair of words. Do not skip any.

People who live in India are:

nasty	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	nice
cruel	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	kind
bad	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	good
unfriendly	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	friendly
dishonest	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	honest
starving	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	well fed
unhealthy	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	healthy
poor	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	rich
weak	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	strong
dirty	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	clean
untalented	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	talented
ugly	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	beautiful
non religious	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	religious
uninteresting	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	interesting

Results of Affective Index obtained from pre-test, and post-test measures.

	X_1	X_2	D	D^2
Sum	632	661	29	91.
Mean	22.57	23.61	1.04	

$$t = \frac{29}{\frac{28 \times 91 - 29^2}{28-1.}}$$

$$t = \frac{29}{63.22} = 3.64$$

For 27dfs a t of 2.052 is required for significance at the .05 level. The observed value of t is well above this and we conclude that the difference between means is significant.

Rejecting the null hypothesis we can safely say that the Topic Today Newspaper articles brought about a favourable change in the attitudes of the Grade five students.